

**Board of State History
Internal Briefing Document
Utah Committee on Geographic Names
Re: Proposal to Change Negro Bill Canyon to Grandstaff Canyon
Spring 2017**

The Utah Committee on Geographic Names (Committee) has been asked by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) to review and vote concerning a proposed geographic name change outside of Moab, Utah. The Grand County Council has proposed to the BGN the existing name “Negro Bill Canyon” be changed to “Grandstaff Canyon.” History is seeking to inform State leadership concerning the proposed name change and potential implications. The proposed name change is locally divisive, with strong opinions on each side. Some facts:

Committee Background

- The BGN actually holds the authority to change a geographic name and to make it official for inclusion on federal maps and other publications. The Utah Committee only reviews the proposal and votes to support or not support.
- The Committee was created by a Governor’s Executive Order and is housed as part of History.
- The Committee consists of eleven, largely volunteer, members who are appointed by the Governor’s Office.
- The Committee collects and reviews landowner, tribal, county, and local opinions as part of the proposal review process.
- The Committee meets quarterly and reviews between 3 and 10 new proposals a year. The next meeting is May 5th, 2017 in the Rio Grande Building where this proposal is slated for review and vote.
- Anyone can propose a new name or propose a name change for geographic features through the BGN process.

Proposal Background

- Negro Bill Canyon was named for William Grandstaff who was an African American prospector and rancher who lived in and around Moab in the late 1800’s. He was historically known by the derogatory version of Negro Bill.
- Grand County Council is the proponent of the name change as of January 18th, 2017.
- The landowner, BLM, supports the name change via formal letter January 25th, 2017.
- Salt Lake Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) does not support the change and does not find the term Negro offensive in this context as stated in a letter to Grand County Council on July 21st, 2015.
- Grand County Historical Preservation Commission does not support the name change via resolution/letter on January 6th, 2017.
- In September 2016 the BLM changed the administrative name (and signage) of the trailhead from Negro Bill Canyon to Grandstaff Canyon Trailhead, functionally eliminating the public facing issues regarding the name.